EDITORIAL

COSTS AND LOSSES

THE logic of the Federal Government's refusal to allow SA factories to use fuel oil during the coal crisis is not plain.

Between 10,000 and 15,000 factory workers have been stood down. About half could have been kept in work if fuel oil had been released to factories with auxiliary power plants.

Fuel oil costs dollars, and dollars are scarce. But a Chamber of Manufactures survey shows the cost of using fuel oil would be trifling compared with benefits to workers and industry.

The chamber estimates about 1,460 gallons of oil fuel a day would be needed to operate auxiliary plants in 40 factories. This would provide work for more than 6,000 employes, drawing nearly £8,000 a day in wages. The daily value of production resulting would exceed £35,000. And the dollar value of fuel consumed, the chamber says, would be only about $145 a day—less than £50.

Stated reason for the Federal Government's refusal is that to supply individual factories with fuel oil might place firms without auxiliary plants at a disadvantage.

If this is in fact the reason, it is one of the poorest ever heard. It amounts to a slap by the Government at efficiency and foresight in industry.

South Australia now knows it cannot get oil fuel when coal supplies fail. Victoria offers this State a lesson. The coal position there is "reasonably safe," because coal has been imported from abroad.

Coal imported from Britain or elsewhere is costly. But SA authorities should weigh this cost against the all-round losses caused when industry has to close down.

A job for everybody

IT is good news that the South Australian tree-planting drive is not to be dropped.

The drive was planned to coincide with the Royal visit this year, and fears have been expressed that cancellation of the visit would reduce the vigor of the effort. The SA Treeplanters' Association secretary (Mr. H. S. Suckling) says that this is not so.

The association has an important job to do. It can wake public consciousness of the importance of tree-planting, and place in the hands of public and semi-public bodies, and also of private people, the best information on selection of trees to be planted and planting methods.

But the association can reach its goal only if it receives full-bodied public support. South Australia's—and Australia's—need of a vigorous treeplanting policy is so great that it is inconceivable that this support will not be given.

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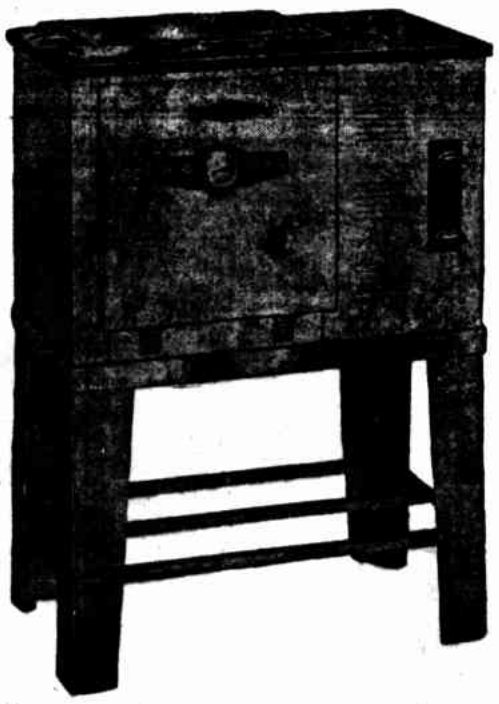

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Strange confessions at Soviet trials

THE Communist court in Budapest has sentenced Cardinal Mindszenty, Primate of Hungary, to life imprisonment on charges of high treason.

The court also ordered that the cardinal be deprived of his civil rights and have his property confiscated.

Cardinal Mindszenty and six others had pleaded guilty.

The baffling thing about this trial is that it has followed the same curious pattern of all Communist demonstration trials for the past 20 years:—

- **Accused men facing capital charges have confessed their guilt—generally abjectly.**
- **They have gone much further in their confessions than even the prosecutor's words suggested they would.**
- **They have used the same sort of language and phraseology—as though they had all learned their confession at the same bench.**
- **They have implicated others by their confessions without any sign of concern.**
- **They have given a general impression of negativeness, as though they were automatons.**

At the Budapest trial Cardinal Mindszenty renounced the letter he wrote before his arrest, warning his followers to take no notice of any confession he might make.

Then he went on to say: "Before the court trial opens I admit that essentially I am guilty of the acts with which I am charged according to the State criminal code."

Not once did he look like being even a potential martyr.

NOT once did he seem to show a spark of independent willpower.

Let's glance at some of the big Communist demonstration trials of the past and trace this same negative behaviour pattern through them.

In May, 1928, the Shakhty sabotage trial opened in Moscow.

The Soviet tried 50 Russian and three German technicians and engineers from the coal industry on charges of counter-revolutionary sabotage and espionage.

This was the first of the demonstration trials which baffled the world with their spectacle of men confessing—willingly it seemed—a multitude of crimes.

The judge was M. Vishinsky, now Deputy Foreign Minister. In later trials he acted as prosecutor.

When the trial began only 52 men were in court. Prisoner Nekrasoff, his counsel explained, was suffering from hallucinations, and had been placed in a padded cell, where he screamed about rifles pointed at his heart and suffered paroxysms.

Some of the 52 men had already made fulsome confessions of guilt during the preliminary investigations behind closed doors.

Ten of the accused men had confessed and implicated the others. Six others had made important admissions. The rest, including the three Germans, said they were innocent.

HERE is a report of Skorutto's part in the trial from Eugene Lyons' book, "Assignment in Utopia":

"Last night," he said in effect, "I wrote out and signed a statement confessing my own guilt as well as the guilt of Rabinovich, Imineetov, and others . . ."

The words had barely registered on our minds when the court room was electrified by an unearthly shriek from the box where the relatives of the prisoners sat. . . . It was a woman's voice.

"Kolya," the woman cried, "Kolya, darling, don't lie. Don't. You know you're innocent."

The prisoner collapsed into a chair. . . . Hurriedly Vishinsky adjourned the session for 10 minutes. . . .

When the session was re-opened and calm restored, he (Skorutto) came once more to the microphone.

"Yes, I wrote a confession last night. That was at 9 o'clock. But I could not go to sleep. For eight hours I struggled with my conscience. At 5 in the morning I wrote another statement in which I withdrew the first one. I could not betray my friends. I am innocent."

Krylenko (the prosecutor) was once more master of himself—cool, relentless, at his most sarcastic. It was not the guilt of this one prisoner that he must establish, but the name of the GPU that he must protect.

One dread thought hammered at everybody's mind; what were the pressures which had driven this Skorutto, while allegedly too ill to attend the trial, to indite a confession only to withdraw it eight tortured hours later?

Did anyone force him to confess. Krylenko wanted to know. The inflection of his voice was ominous. Was he threatened?

BUKHARIN (left), Zinoviev (centre), and Kamenev were three of the biggest guinea-pigs at the Soviet purge trials of the late 1930's. All pleaded guilty. All died — Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1936, and Bukharin in 1938 — for crimes against the State.

SKORUTTO was like a man who had lost his mind. He wrung his hands and wandered about the platform. No, nobody had forced him, he finally said.

"These men had lied to me," he tried to explain, "my own friends, and they lied about me. So I lied about them. . . . It has been agony. Can't you understand. My God, can no one understand. Eight nights I have not slept. I took drugs, but I could not sleep, and finally I decided to confess."

He staggered from one corner of the rostrum to the other, like one caged. Then he stopped at the microphone.

"I never did these things of which they accuse me. Never. Though I knew what waited for me. . . ."

The sentence remained unfinished. Again the shadow of the unspoken things behind the curtains of the public trial. Again Krylenko and the judge putting question to erase that shadow.

Why had he confessed, Vishinsky pinioned the distracted Skorutto with the spearpoint of his anger.

"I had hoped this court would be more lenient with me if I pleaded guilty and accused the others," Skorutto blurted out. . . .

The following morning Skorutto once more stepped into the limelight. He spoke in a monotone, like a dead man from the grave. The confession was true, he now declared, and its retraction a lie. It was the agonised cry of his wife which yesterday had broken his determination to attest his guilt—and the guilt of those whom he had implicated, Lyons wrote.

By Ronald McKie

THE Metropolitan-Vickers trial of 1933 was another Communist demonstration.

The Soviet charged six Englishmen and a number of Russians, all employed by the Metropolitan-Vickers Company in Russia, with high crimes against the Soviet State.

Two of the six Englishmen wrote and signed elaborate confessions of espionage, sabotage, and bribery during their interrogation by the GPU, in which they involved many of their countrymen.

One of them, W. H. MacDonald, stuck to his confession at the trial, and the other, Leslie Thornton, repudiated his confession.

Eugene Lyons, who reported the trial, says: "Even the theory that they were guilty does not suffice to explain their confessions, since every consideration of self-interest and professional reputation, of loyalty to their friends, and patriotism to their Government, should have prompted them to deny the charges.

"It was not as though they had been confronted with incontrovertible proofs of guilt and obliged to accept the inevitable. Not one tiny scrap of independent evidence to support their admissions was offered by the Government. . . .

"Whatever it may have been that induced these men to tar themselves and their colleagues, it was not disclosed at the trial

"I feel sure the real story, the real compulsions, were located far behind the scenes. What transpired in the improvised court room at the former Nobles Club seemed to be little more than a shadow play on a screen."

THE trial of ex-Commissars Zinoviev and Kamenev and 14 others in August, 1936, provides more pictures of the Communist trial pattern.

The Soviet charged these men with complicity in the murder in December, 1934, of Sergei Kirov, head of the Leningrad Soviet, and one of the four men who might have succeeded Stalin.

The two main accused were already serving long sentences for having been "morally responsible" for the act of the assassin, Nikolaev.

Zinoviev and Kamenev both pleaded guilty. Kamenev, a former chief of the Moscow Soviets, gave evidence against himself and those accused with him.

Prosecutor Vishinsky: "Were you a bloodthirsty enemy of the Soviet Union?"

Kamenev: "I was a bloodthirsty enemy of the Soviets."

Vishinsky: "Were you anti-Soviet because it was building socialism successfully?"

Kamenev: "No, we wanted power for ourselves. We were thirsty for power.

"Three times I was expelled and reinstated and given responsibility. There is no such example of tolerance in the history of any country."

The Soviet tolerance was so great that Kamenev and the others died in front of a firing squad 24 hours later.

The anti-Soviet "bloc of Rights and Trotskyites" trial in March, 1938, is littered with characters pleading guilty with the fervor of hot gospellers.

The Soviet accused 21 men—including Bukharin, Rykov, Yagoda, Krestinsky, and others—with having spied for Britain, Germany, Japan, and Poland.

AT the start of the trial all except Krestinsky pleaded guilty, and one by one testified against Krestinsky.

For three days Krestinsky proclaimed his innocence, against a battering from Prosecutor Vishinsky.

Then he suddenly withdrew his plea, and abjectly pleaded guilty to all charges.

Perhaps one of the choicest pieces of confession from this trial came from Bessonov. His last plea, as reported in the official Russian verbatim report of the trial, reads:

"Citizen Judges, together with the other accused I answer here before the proletarian court for the very grave crimes against the State, committed by the 'bloc of Rights and Trotskyists', and myself personally as one who actively participated in it.

"Of these crimes the most terrible, tremendous, is the treason to the fatherland of which I am guilty. I was an intermediary in and participant of the criminal negotiations between the 'bloc of Rights and Trotskyists' and Fascist circles in Germany . . .

"The stern hand of proletarian justice was timely in uncovering the ghastly ulcers of treason and treachery, in exposing the monstrous plot and placing its participants, including myself, before the relentless responsibility of Soviet law."

Proletarian justice was lenient to Bessonov. It gave him 15 years' gaol. But it shot 18 of his 21 cobbers.

Trees benefit the climate

THE beneficial effect of tree planting in city areas is illustrated in the latest weather bulletin by the Commonwealth Forestry Bureau.

The bureau's records show that cup anemometers in Canberra recorded only 27,683 miles of wind in 1948, compared with 42,000 in 1929.

A weather official said records over 20 years showed how weather conditions in the national capital had become more comfortable as the growth of trees lessened wind velocity.

Although trees broke down the surface velocity, conditions above the tree-line remained as bleak as ever.

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